

Polit. Pamph. vol 145.

T H O U G H T S

ON THE

P R O P R I E T Y

OF

D I S S O L V I N G

THE

PRESENT PARLIAMENT.

THE O. U. G. H. T. S.

ON THE

P. R. O. P. E. T. Y.



D. I. S. S. O. L. V. I. N. G.

THE

P. R. E. S. E. N. T. P. A. R. L. I. A. M. E. N. T.

THOUGHTS

ON THE

PROPRIETY

OF

DISSOLVING

THE

PRESENT PARLIAMENT.

“ It is fit that the Executive Power should regulate
“ the duration of Parliaments, according to the circum-
“ stances, and exigencies of the State.”

SPIRIT OF LAWS, Book II. Chap. 6,

L O N D O N :

Printed for J. FIELDING, in PATER-NOSTER-ROW, 1782.

[Price One Shilling.]

T H O U G H T S

ON THE

P R O P R I E T Y

D I S S O L V I N G

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P R E S E N T

"It is at the Admiralty Tower, London, that the Admiralty of England, according to the custom of the Admiralty, and in accordance with the orders of the Admiralty, has the honor to acknowledge the receipt of the letter of the Admiralty of England, dated the 1st of January, 1841, and to inform you that the same has been forwarded to the Admiralty of England, for their consideration and decision."

L O N D O N

[Printed and Sold by]

THOUGHTS, &c.

IT is a peculiar advantage which attends the British Constitution, that, at certain fixed periods, new persons may be introduced into a considerable share of the legislative power of the State, who may either tread in the footsteps of their predecessors, if they have proved successful, or may support new men and new measures, where a change is likely to be of advantage. This

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circumstance must for ever prevent that attachment to any one particular system, to which so many other nations have fallen a sacrifice ; and hence we may flatter ourselves, that such alterations may always be brought about in the direction of public affairs, as may be suited to the temper of the times, and the situation of the people.

But, in addition to the fixed and usual changes in the third branch of the Legislature, it has been also determined, and it is justly accounted one of the most important branches of the royal prerogative, that the Crown shall be fully entitled to dissolve the existing Parliament, and
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to require the assistance of new representatives to the great council of the nation.

That such a prerogative has been wisely vested in the Crown, particularly since the establishment of triennial, and still more of septennial Parliaments, appears sufficiently evident in whatever view the question may be considered.

In so long a space of time as three, and still more so of seven years, the Sovereign may possibly have just grounds to be dissatisfied with the measures which the Commons might think proper to recommend to his royal attention, and may

wish to know at least, whether the conduct they have pursued, was really agreeable to the general sense of the people.

Without such a check, it might be in the power of a majority of the House of Commons to confederate together, and either totally to prevent any public business from being carried on, or to oblige the executive power to accede to such exorbitant demands as they might chuse to insist upon.

By means of such a prerogative vested in the Crown, it became less necessary for the people to have their time occupied by frequent or perpetual

tual elections : they may invest those in whom they have reason to confide, with the high privilege of acting as their guardians and representatives for three, or perhaps for seven years, when they know that it is in the power of the Sovereign to dismiss those representatives from that trust, if they abuse the confidence that has been bestowed upon them. It may be said, that such a dismissal may not always be consistent with the supposed interest, or agreeable to the real views and wishes of the Sovereign. Perhaps that may be the case : but it is at the same time in the power of the people to petition the Crown for such a dissolution; and they may undoubtedly call those

ministers

ministers to account, when a new Parliament assembles, by whose advice their petitions were rejected.

Such a prerogative is necessary also, least any differences should take place between the two Houses of Parliament, with regard to their respective rights and privileges, and which it is possible might rise to such a height, that nothing but the exercise of such a power in the Crown, could prevent the destruction of that union and harmony, which ought to exist between the different orders of the State.

Lastly, when any material change took place in the government of
public

public affairs, or when it was proper to be thoroughly acquainted with the sentiments of the nation upon great, political, and public questions, it might be equally prudent and necessary to have an opportunity of consulting with a new set of men, recently selected from the multitude, who might come into Parliament fully impressed with the real sense, and genuine wishes of the people, in all the different districts of the kingdom.

How far it is proper or necessary to exert that branch of the royal prerogative at this time, is the subject of the following considerations.

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The manner in which the late Parliament was dissolved, and the various arts that were made use of to procure a set of men well-inclined to the late administration, are circumstances too well known to require any particular discussion in this place; such manœuvres may appear to the callous conscience of a statesman perfectly harmless and innocent, but it is a question well entitled to the consideration of the public, whether a Parliament, formed in so inauspicious a manner, ought to be entrusted, in this momentous crisis, with so decisive a share in the government of the State?

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For when men are placed in a great and important situation by the assistance of any particular party, and are brought into power with a view of supporting their measures in Parliament, they in general make a conscience of a firm and resolute adherence to that party; and, afraid of the little squibs and paltry ridicule to which every public character is exposed, are too apt to sacrifice the essential interests of their country to the terror of personal disgrace.--- This is a fault which the very best of men are unfortunately proud of committing.

Farther, it is erroneously imagined by many, unacquainted with the

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real state and character of the House of Commons, that the dissensions which take place in that Assembly are merely the effect of an interested struggle for profit or for power ; but that is far from being the case ; and the Author does not hesitate to assert, on his own personal knowledge of the present representatives of the people, that there is a real and substantial difference of opinion among some of them at least, founded on principles in which both parties are so strongly rivetted, that it is hardly possible that they can ever coalesce. What a dismal prospect must not this afford to those who are convinced, that the safety of the Nation depends upon unanimity

mity in the two Houses of Parliament, and how little reason is there to expect such unanimity, should the present Parliament continue?

It is well known also, that for many years past, a warm and serious contest has taken place between the two great parties into which our Senate is divided. In the course of the struggle, as might naturally be expected, the combatants proceeded from difference to reproach, and from reproach to aversion. Their mutual prejudices it is impossible at present to remove; and if they are compelled, by the continuance of the present Parliament, to assemble together, these personal prejudices

must break forth, and must be attended with very dangerous consequences. Such consequences, however, a wise and well-timed dissolution might totally prevent: for many of the most violent, perhaps, on both sides, if once the chain were broken, if they are once more freed from any tie in consequence of their present seats in Parliament, may not again incline to involve themselves, and indeed the country at large, in such pernicious contentions.

Besides, it ought to be remembered, that in former times, only one branch of the legislature was affected by a Parliamentary dissolution: but that since the Union with Scotland,

land,

land, a new Parliament may possibly make a difference of no less a number than sixteen votes, in the Upper Assembly. We have seen the difficulties which our present Ministers have had to contend with, in carrying certain just and reasonable constitutional alterations through that Assembly. From the past we may judge of the future ; and this may be safely asserted, that unless some change is brought about in that House of Parliament, the remaining alterations which the people at large so anxiously look for, and so zealously expect, allowing that they receive the sanction of the Commons, may yet be fatally frustrated in another place.

Nor

Nor ought it to be omitted, that the present Ministers, from a natural predilection for their friends, and a natural jealousy of their opponents, have been led to make almost a total change in the different departments of the State; and from views of public economy, and with a wise and laudable resolution of diminishing any improper influence of the Crown, have totally annihilated many places which were possessed by members of the two Houses, particularly of the Lower Assembly, whose resentment it is natural to expect, whilst they continue in Parliament, and whose opposition to the measures of Government, though founded

founded on interested motives, cannot fail to be highly prejudicial.

The last argument which it may be necessary to adduce in support of such a measure is this, that undoubtedly many men have procured seats in the present Parliament with views merely of private profit. So much was the world at large impressed with ideas of the lucrative advantages which might be obtained by Parliamentary interest, that seats was purchased at a considerable expence, with the fullest hopes of a very large retribution. Whatever might formerly be the case, it is surely necessary for the future, that every idea of that nature should be
 extirpated

extirpated by the root : nor is there any plan that can so well contribute to so desirable a purpose, as dismissing the present Parliament, and affording another striking instance of the uncertainty of such views.

The principal objection that can be urged against such a measure is, that this branch of the royal prerogative has been seldom exercised, and that Parliaments in general have been suffered to exist, until the time approached when a legal period would be put to their duration ; with a view, however, of refuting that objection, the Author has been led to draw up the following short state of the Parliaments which have taken place

place since the reign of Henry the Seventh, from which it will appear, how little truth or justice there is in that observation. Indeed, if such a rule had been adhered to, it could never have been calculated for such an awful crisis as now presents itself to our view.

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STATE of the different PARLIAMENTS, since the Reign of HENRY the Seventh, with the Period of their respective Dissolutions.

Number of Parliaments.	Names of the Monarchs.	When met.	When dissolved.	Years. Mon. Days.	Exited.
1	Henry the Eighth	21 January, 1509	23 February, 1509	— 1	2
2	—	4 February, 1511	4 March, 1513	2 1	—
3	—	5 February, 1514	22 December, 1515	1 10	17
4	—	15 April, 1523	13 August, 1523	— 3	29
5	—	3 November, 1530	4 April, 1536	5 5	1
6	—	8 June, 1536	18 July, 1536	— 1	10
7	—	28 April, 1539	24 July, 1540	1 2	26
8	—	16 January, 1541	29 March, 1544	3 2	13
9	—	23 November, 1545	31 January, 1547	1 2	8
10	Edward the Sixth	4 November, 1547	15 April, 1552	4 5	11
11	—	1 March, 1553	31 March, 1553	— 1	—
12	Mary	5 October, 1553	6 December, 1553	— 2	1
13	—	2 April, 1554	5 May, 1554	— 1	3
14	—	12 November, 1554	16 January, 1555	— 2	4
15	—	21 October, 1555	9 December, 1555	— 1	18
16	—	20 January, 1557	17 November, 1557	— 9	28
17	Elizabeth	23 January, 1558	8 May, 1558	— 3	16
			Carry over	21	9 7

Number of Parliaments.	Names of the Mo- narchs.	When met.	When dissolved.	Years.	Existed, Mon. Days.
18	Elizabeth	11 January, 1562	Brought over	21	9 7
19	—	2 April, 1571	2 January, 1567	4	11 22
20	—	8 May, 1572	29 May, 1571	—	1 27
21	—	23 November, 1585	18 March, 1580	7	10 10
22	—	29 October, 1586	14 September, 1586	—	9 21
23	—	4 February, 1588	23 March, 1587	—	4 23
24	—	19 November, 1592	29 March, 1588	—	1 25
25	—	24 October, 1597	10 April, 1593	—	4 22
26	—	7 October, 1601	9 February, 1598	—	3 16
27	James the First	19 March, 1603	29 December, 1601	—	2 22
28	—	5 April, 1614	9 February, 1611	7	10 21
29	—	30 January, 1620	7 June, 1614	—	2 2
30	—	19 February, 1623	8 February, 1621	1	— 9
31	Charles the First	17 May, 1625	24 March, 1625	2	1 5
32	—	6 February, 1626	12 August, 1625	—	2 26
33	—	17 March, 1627	15 June, 1626	—	4 9
34	—	13 April, 1640	10 March, 1628	—	11 23
35	—	3 November, 1640	5 May, 1640	—	— 122
36	Charles the Second	25 April, 1660	20 April, 1653	12	5 17
			29 December, 1660	—	8 4
			Carry over	63	— 3

Number of Parliaments.	Names of the Mo- narchs.	When met.	When dissolved.	Years.	Exited. Mon. Days.
37	Charles the Second	8 May, 1661	Brought over	63	3
38	—	6 March, 1679	24 January, 1698	16	16
39	—	17 October, 1679	12 July, 1679	—	6
40	—	21 March, 1681	18 January, 1681	1	1
41	James the Second	12 March, 1685	28 March, 1681	—	7
42	—	22 January, 1688	28 July, 1687	2	16
43	William the Third	20 March, 1689	26 February, 1689	1	4
44	—	27 November, 1695	11 October, 1695	6	22
45	—	24 August, 1698	7 July, 1698	2	10
46	—	26 February, 1700	19 December, 1700	2	26
47	—	30 December, 1701	11 November, 1701	1	5
48	Anne	20 August, 1702	2 July, 1702	—	2
49	—	14 June, 1705	5 April, 1705	2	16
50	—	8 July, 1708	15 April, 1708	2	1
51	—	25 November, 1710	21 September, 1710	2	13
52	—	12 November, 1713	8 August, 1713	2	14
53	George the First	17 March, 1715	15 January, 1715	1	3
54	—	10 May, 1722	10 March, 1721	5	21
55	George the Second	28 November, 1727	5 August, 1727	5	26
	—		18 April, 1734	6	21
			Carry over	127	11
					9

Number of Parliaments.	Names of the Mo- narchs.	When met.	When dissolved.	Years. Mon. Days.	Existed.
56	George the Second	13 June, 1734	Brought over	127	11 9
57	—	25 June, 1741	28 April, 1741	6	10 15
58	—	13 August, 1747	18 June, 1747	5	11 24
59	—	31 May, 1754	8 April, 1754	6	7 26
60	George the Third	19 May, 1761	20 March, 1761	6	9 20
61	—	10 May, 1768	12 March, 1768	6	9 21
62	—	29 November, 1774	30 September, 1774	6	4 20
			1 September, 1780	5	9 3
				172	11 12

Thus it appears, that from the year 1509 to the dissolution of the late Parliament, a period of above 270 years, that about 170 years were with, and about 100 years without, the existence of any legal Parliament, unless the councils called by Cromwell could be included in that description.

From

From an attentive consideration of the above state, which is drawn up with as much accuracy as possible, from the rolls and journals of both Houses of Parliament, the following facts may be deduced :

In the first place, it appears, that since the year 1509, (when it is generally supposed that the duration of Parliaments was extended beyond one year) only four Parliaments have existed beyond seven years, and that only seven more have had a sextennial duration.

In the second place, it is sufficiently evident, that of the rest, only five Parliaments have lasted above
five

five years; only two Parliaments above four, and but one above three,

Thirdly, of the remaining number, only nine existed above two years, and no less than thirty-four for a shorter period.

Lastly, it is certain, that one Parliament with another, the duration of each, since the reign of Henry the Seventh, does not exceed the space of two years and about nine months, even including the long Parliament in the reign of King Charles the First, and the still longer one which his son retained in existence for the enormous period of about seventeen years.

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It may be urged as an objection to a measure of this nature, that such a dissolution may exasperate the friends of the present ministers, who may not be fond of being again immersed in the trouble and expence of a new election; and may also throw the nation into a ferment at a very improper period.

It is not improbable, that some of those respectable characters by whose vigour and perseverance the late administration was overturned, may be satisfied with the glory they have acquired by sharing in so brilliant an event, and may not be extremely desirous of any farther labour in the vineyard of the public. But
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if their anxiety for a seat in Parliament still remains, even after those in whom they have reason to place such confidence are entrusted with the government of the State, they must surely be either very indigent, or very inattentive to the interest of their friends; if they are not both able and willing to undergo the expence of another election, for the sake of confirming the power of those who have already shewn their zeal for the service of the State, and who have pledged themselves to carry various plans into execution, which cannot fail to be of the most essential benefit to the public.

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As to the ferment which such an event may occasion, it is doubtless more imaginary than real, and at any rate must be endured, if it is really necessary in the present circumstances of the State. The apprehension of similar dangers was much greater when the change of ministers took place in the year 1710; and though the existing Parliament of that time could not legally continue above ten months, and though the nation, at the period in question, was much more filled with dissensions and tumult than it is at present, yet a dissolution of Parliament was not only proposed, but actually carried into execution. Since the reign of Queen Anne, no change of ministers has taken place
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in any degree so extensive as the present. The Revolution itself did not produce so great an alteration in the different departments of the State. How is it possible then to suppose, that it would be unwise or imprudent in our present ministers, when so great an alteration is effected by the exertions of Parliament, fairly to try what are the real feelings of the people upon this subject.

But the solid answer to every objection against such a measure is this, that the matters which must come under the consideration of Parliament during the next session, are of so important a nature, that it is absolutely necessary that new

men should be appointed by the people, for giving such subjects the fullest and most complete discussion.

When the questions are considered, which must be agitated when the Parliament again assembles, the people at large must undoubtedly see the propriety of once more considering the principles and abilities of those men on whose judgment their future happiness and splendor must depend. It is probable, that in the space of a few months, that Parliament must be assembled, which, in all probability, is to decide upon the terms on which a peace may be obtained ; and if they cannot be complied with, which must rouse the

the people to carry on the war with a spirit, not to be surpassed by any former exertions in the history of this country. It will be incumbent upon the same Parliament, to examine into the state of our finances, to restore the strength, and in some respects the discipline of our forces, to re-establish a just and constitutional connexion between Great-Britain and her Colonies: to unite this nation in the closest bonds with its brethren in Ireland, and above all, to place the Constitution of this country upon a rock, never afterwards to be shaken. What upright representative can think of these things for a moment without trembling, when he undertakes to exercise
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his judgment on almost any single point which is above stated, and without wishing again to have the sanction of his constituents for so important a purpose.

To conclude, many other arguments might be adduced upon this occasion, in which the present Administration are personally interested: but these come not within the scope of this performance. It is the public advantage, and not the power or the safety of any Administration whatever, that could alone impell the Author of these sheets to trouble the world with his thoughts upon this subject. Our present Ministers must be blind indeed, if they do

do not perceive, that a majority of the present House of Commons are hostile to them, or at least a number sufficient to form an opposition, that would disable them from carrying into execution the great objects they have in view. Their enemies are dispersed, but they are still in force ; they may yet rally, and stand their ground in many a future engagement. The spirited resolve of a single council will confirm the rout, and at once establish the future safety and prosperity of the country.

F I N I S.

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